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INFO RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 7114
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY 3935
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3248
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 8875
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 1855
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 3687
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1285
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS AND PRM
STATE ALSO PASS TO USAID
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SUBJECT: IMPACT OF RAINFALL ON SRI LANKA'S MANIK FARM IDP CAMPS

REF: A) Colombo 775 B) Colombo 753

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Recent rainfall in Sri Lanka's northern district of Vavuniya, the location of the Manik Farm IDP camps, was a wake-up call for the Government of Sri Lanka and international organizations conducting humanitarian operations. Major improvements appear necessary to avert disaster prior to the beginning of the monsoon season. Using the established cluster approach, the UN and NGOs are conducting a technical assessment of the possible impact of the monsoon season (late September through December) on Manik Farm. By next week they expect to have this assessment and a contingency plan to share with the Government of Sri Lanka and the international community. End Summary.

Seasonal Rainfall - Harbinger of Things to Come?

¶2. (U) On Friday August 14, approximately ten centimeters (4 inches) of rain fell in three hours on the District of Vavuniya in Sri Lanka's Northern Province - the site of camps for people displaced by the recently-concluded conflict between Government forces and the LTTE. The largest IDP facility in Vavuniya District, Manik Farm, is broken into several contiguous zones (individual camps) that house approximately 230,000 people in total. Throughout the weekend, intermittent rains continued at Manik Farm, with more rain forecast for this week. Most agree that August rainfall in Vavuniya District is normal and sporadic, unlike the intense, daily monsoonal rains due to begin next month.

¶3. (U) Friday's rainfall caused immediate flooding at Manik Farm, with Zone 4 (housing approximately 38,000 people in temporary shelters) most severely affected. Depending on the source (GSL, UN, or NGO), reports on the severity of the rain vary. Photographic evidence indicates damaged and destroyed shelters inundated with standing water, especially in Zone 4, where no drainage infrastructure was in place. Emergency response measures were taken to move people to safe, dry facilities and to provide them with basic food and drinking water.

Discussions Involving Donors and the UN

14. (U) Although most flooding was temporary, with water eventually running off via a drainage system still being constructed in Zones 1, 2, and 3, the normal rain of a few hours has rung alarm bells throughout the humanitarian community. Hosted by the USAID Director, a small group of donors (ECHO, DFID, Swiss, Ausaid) met yesterday to discuss Manik Farm, as well as options to support the United Nations in its ongoing discussions with the GSL. There was general agreement that a stronger advocacy position needs to be taken by the UN and donors with the Government concerning protection issues of freedom of movement and of IDP safety especially given the concern that the Manik Farm site will not fare well in the upcoming monsoon season.

15. (U) Yesterday afternoon, donor representatives met with the UN Resident Coordinator and his heads of agencies - UNHCR, UNDSS, UNOCHA, UNICEF, WFP. Some donor representatives (ECHO, DFID, Germany) stated that they were not prepared to provide additional support to humanitarian operations in Manik Farm, after the expiration of their currently funded activities (generally ending in October). Their position is that Manik Farm, with the recent rainfall, has proven to be technically unsustainable, from an operational standpoint. In addition, they do not believe that the GSL has made progress on such important protection issues as freedom of movement and release of no-risk IDPs to host families.

How to Engage the Government

16. (SBU) The UN Resident Coordinator was appreciative of the donors' offer to support the UN, to synchronize messages to the GSL, and to seek more effective ways to engage the GSL on these pressing topics. One suggestion was that he and two or three heads of mission from the largest CHAP donor countries meet with the President or with the Senior Presidential Advisor Basil Rajapaksa. It was also suggested that the UN consult more closely with donor countries regarding resources, and parameters for programming those resources, that could be counted on in the coming months to support the immediate and medium-term humanitarian needs of IDPs in the North.

COMMENT

17. (SBU) It is increasingly clear that the UN does not have a concrete plan or effective strategy to engage the GSL on the major humanitarian topics of the immediate requirements of IDPs in temporary facilities such as Manik Farm, as well as the return of these IDPs in the months to come. Relations between the UN and the GSL continue to be strained, with the UN apparently reluctant to share details regarding the state of negotiations of its individual agencies with the broader, international community. This cautious attitude, combined with the GSL's ongoing obfuscation of any strategic planning for de-mining and IDP returns, keeps donors in the dark regarding plans for IDPs. Donors are becoming increasingly concerned about the lack of progress on releasing the IDPs, the ability to engage the GSL, and the leadership of the UN on these key humanitarian issues.

18. (SBU) There is general agreement that the humanitarian situation - perhaps soon to become another humanitarian "crisis" with the monsoonal rains ahead - needs to be addressed simultaneously on two fronts. The most pressing is the immediate needs of 230,000 people who continue to be confined in substandard conditions in Manik Farm.

Worst fears are that flooding from heavy rains, starting in September, could make it impossible for people to access food and safe water. There is concern also for major health problems associated with exposure brought about by collapsing shelters, and waterborne diseases brought about by contamination from overflowing latrines. The second focus needs to be a returns strategy, with numbers of people slated for specific destinations, based on realistic timeframes that are influenced by demining and the conditions of the communities to which they will return. Post - and other western donors - has consistently asked that the GSL provide such a strategy. Post will continue to closely monitor the situation and will submit its second benchmarks report on August 31.

End Comment.

MOORE